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UNCLAS PRAGUE 001588

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SUBJECT: CZECH PARLIAMENT AGAIN REJECTS LEGALIZATION OF PROSTITUTION

REF: A. PRAGUE 0474

1. The lower house of the Czech Parliament has rejected a bill that would have paved the way for the legal regulation of prostitution in the Czech Republic. The proposal would have permitted the GOCR to withdraw from the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. Withdrawal from the convention is a precondition to a bill legalizing and regulating prostitution, which repeated governments have tried to advance. The proposal enjoyed the support of the Social Democrat-led government. Prostitution in the Czech Republic is currently unregulated and it is neither explicitly proscribed nor permitted. Both pimping and trafficking in persons for the purpose of prostitution, however, are illegal under Czech law.

2. The proposal failed by a vote of 64-26 in the Chamber of Deputies with only 90 of the 200 members of the body even voting on the measure. Opposition to the plan united both conservative and left-wing parties, as the Christian Democrats, a junior member of the ruling coalition, broke ranks with the government and joined opposition Civic Democrats, and the Communist Party to defeat the bill. Asked one Christian Democrat Deputy during the debate, "Do we really want Prague to turn into one huge European brothel?"

3. This is the second time this year Parliament has rejected the government proposal (reftel). Observers predict that the government will not try again prior to elections scheduled for next June.

4. COMMENT. Though clearly a positive development, the defeat of legalized prostitution still leaves the sex trade in a highly ambiguous position in a country where trafficking in persons remains a problem. Although the Czechs are clearly unwilling to legalize prostitution, there is also little will to adopt more stringent steps to criminalize the practice. END COMMENT

CABANISS